

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS
OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION**

**Douglas School District
Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process Report 2001-2002**

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This report contains the results of the steering committee's self-assessment and the validation of the self-assessment by the Office of Special Education. The report addresses six principles – General Supervision, Free Appropriate Public Education, Appropriate Evaluation, Procedural Safeguards, Individualized Education Program and Least Restrictive Environment. Each principle is rated based on the following scale:

Promising Practice	The district/agency exceeds this requirement through the implementation of innovative, high-quality programming and instructional practices.
Maintenance	The district/agency consistently meets this requirement.
Needs Improvement	The district/agency has met this requirement but has identified areas of weakness that left unaddressed may result in non-compliance.
Out of Compliance	The district/agency consistently does not meet this requirement.
Not applicable	In a small number of cases, the standard may not be applicable for your district/agency. If an item is not applicable, the steering committee should briefly explain why the item is NA. Example – no private schools within the district boundaries.

Principle 1 – General Supervision
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General supervision means the school district's administrative responsibilities to ensure federal and state regulations are implemented and a free appropriate public education is provided for each eligible child with a disability. The specific areas addressed in principle one are child find, referral procedures, children voluntarily enrolled by parents in private schools, students placed by the school district, improving results through performance goals and indicators (assessment, drop out, graduation), professional development, suspension and expulsion rates.

Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary

Data sources used:

- ? Comprehensive plan
- ? Child find data
- ? Interagency agreements
- ? Child count data
- ? Private school contacts

- ? Screening data
- ? Special services meeting data
- ? Staff surveys
- ? Budget information
- ? Special education enrollment data
- ? District newsletters and correspondence
- ? Exit student data
- ? IEP annual progress data
- ? Student file reviews
- ? Testing results
- ? Suspension/expulsion data

Promising Practice

The district provides for children with disabilities that are eligible for special education who are voluntarily enrolled in private schools by their parents, as per the requirements of IDEA. The district has an established and effectively implemented an ongoing child find system to locate, identify, and evaluate children with disabilities, age birth through 21 years who may need special education.

Maintenance

The district has an established and effectively implemented ongoing child find system to locate, identify, and evaluate children with disabilities, ages birth through 21 years who may need special education. The district uses data-based decision making procedures to review and analyze school district-level data in determining whether the district is making progress toward the state performance goals and indicators. The district provides supports and services for children with disabilities that are eligible for out of district placements. Children receive special education and related services according to their IEP. When the district places a child with disabilities in a private school or facility, it ensures special education and related services are provided in accordance with the IEP. In addition, it actively involves parents and school staff in the process. Only one student in the last three years has been suspended/expelled. The district implemented procedures and provided special education services to this student during the time removed from school. The district has in place policies and procedures, which meets the professional development needs of all staff. The district employs adequate personnel who are appropriately supervised and fully licensed or certified to work with children with disabilities. The district implements procedures to determine personnel development needs. The district has an effective pre-referral and referral system in place to ensure students are identified without unnecessary delay. Annually, staff is made aware of referral procedures in their respective buildings. The district has provisions for including parents in the referral process.

Validation Results

Promising Practice

Parents must be afforded the opportunity to participate in meetings with respect to the identification, evaluation, and educational placement of the child and the provision of a free appropriate public education to the child. The Douglas School District consistently makes extra effort to involve parents in all aspects of the special education process. The review team found documentation in all files reviewed that showed evidence of continuous parental participation and input throughout the process.

The district also exceeds expectations for special education support staffing by employing special education clerks. The special education clerks are in most buildings and provide support to the special educators by scheduling meetings, taking notes during meetings, sending out paperwork, filing, typing the IEPs during the IEP meetings, and creating and maintaining the special education records. All of this support allows the special educators that extra time to spend with parents and students.

Maintenance

The review team agrees with all areas of maintenance that were identified by the steering committee with the addition of the provision of services for students voluntarily enrolled in private schools. The district consistently maintains compliance in all general supervision areas.

Principle 2 – Free Appropriate Public Education
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All eligible children with disabilities are entitled to a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. The specific areas addressed in principle two are the provision of FAPE to children residing in group homes, foster homes, or institutions, making FAPE available when a child reaches his/her 3rd birthday and providing FAPE to eligible children with disabilities who have been suspended or expelled from school for more than 10 cumulative days.

Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary

Data sources used:

- ? Comprehensive plan
- ? Parental right pamphlet
- ? Age and placement data
- ? IEP data
- ? Progress reports
- ? Student file reviews
- ? Suspension/expulsion data
- ? Administrator surveys
- ? Staff surveys
- ? Observation/checklists

Promising Practices

The district provides a free appropriate public education including documenting student discipline actions. Parents and staff feel the district provides a quality free appropriate public education to all students 0 – 21.

Maintenance

The district provides a free appropriate public education to all students 0 – 21. The district ensures that all staff is knowledgeable about discipline procedures. Students in special education facing disciplinary action are protected under district policies.

Validation Results**Promising Practice**

The review team agrees that the district provides a free appropriate public education including documenting student discipline actions. The Douglas School District utilizes an effective discipline system district-wide and has only suspended or expelled one student during the past three years. The district also tracks all discipline actions for all students. This tracking system is used to record every student infraction that occurs according to incidence level, severity level, and consequences used to address the infraction, including in and/or out-of-school suspension and student bussing. This system is both comprehensive and innovative and allows administration to check for emerging discipline patterns and plan proactive strategies to address behavior for all students.

Maintenance

The review team agrees that the Douglas School District maintains compliance in the provision of a free and appropriate public education to all students 0 – 21.

Principle 3 – Appropriate Evaluation

A comprehensive evaluation is conducted by a team of knowledgeable staff, which also includes parental input. A valid and reliable evaluation will result in effective individualized education programs for eligible students. The specific areas addressed in principle three are written notice and consent for evaluation, evaluation procedures and instruments, eligibility determination, reevaluation and continuing eligibility.

Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary

Data sources used:

- ? Multidisciplinary team written report process
- ? Permission to evaluation form
- ? Comprehensive plan
- ? Teacher assistance team process
- ? Parent rights pamphlet and video
- ? Personnel information
- ? Student file reviews
- ? Personnel surveys
- ? Parent surveys
- ? Staff training records
- ? Student grades and progress reports
- ? Observations

Promising Practices

The district has policies and procedure in place to conduct appropriate comprehensive evaluations. The district exceeds expectations for special education support staffing by employing special education clerks. Reevaluations are conducted in accordance with all procedural requirements.

Maintenance

The district's evaluation and reevaluation process includes parent involvement. Evaluation results are reviewed and given to parents. The district has policies and procedures, which are used to determine eligibility of students for special education services. The district ensures that evaluation /reevaluation procedures and instruments meet the necessary requirements. Trained personnel follow standardization procedures in the administration of tests. Surveys indicate that test results are used in a child's educational plan. The district adheres to policies and procedures requiring written notice and consent for evaluation.

Areas that need improvement

File reviews and surveys show that the district utilizes prior notice forms however staff needs training to ensure that forms are accurately completed.

Areas out of compliance

File reviews and surveys indicate that the district completes appropriate comprehensive evaluations, however, to date, functional assessments have not been a common practice.

Validation Results

Maintenance

The review team agrees with all areas identified as maintenance by the steering committee in appropriate evaluation with the exception of evaluation/reevaluation procedures, and written notice/consent for evaluation.

Areas that need improvement

The review team agrees that staff needs training to ensure that prior notice forms are accurately completed. Of 29 files reviewed by the team, 6 of the student files contained parental prior notices that were not completed with required content. This is an area of needed improvement for the Douglas School District.

Areas out of compliance

24:05:25:04. Evaluation procedures.

24:05:25:04:02. Determination of needed evaluation data.

Although the Douglas School District steering committee identified comprehensive evaluation procedures as an area of promising practice, the review team identified evaluation/reevaluation procedures, including functional assessment, to be an area of non-compliance for the Douglas School District.

The monitoring team determined that much of the district staff, including regular educators, complete a variety of functional evaluation skills assessments. However, staff did not understand this functional information is to be used for determining specific skills areas affected by the student's disability, the student's present levels of performance, their progress in the general curriculum or development of measurable annual goals and short term instructional objectives. Of the 29 files reviewed, 16 student files had no documentation of functional assessment completed during the evaluation process, or used to make educational decisions about the students.

When completing reevaluations, the IEP team must decide what, if any, additional evaluation data is needed to decide whether or not the student continues to have a disability, the present levels of educational performance of the student, and whether or not the student requires special education and related services. If it is decided that no additional data is needed, the district must provide the parents with notice of this decision and the reasons for this decision. During file reviews and interviews, it was found that staff was unclear as to how to document when no additional evaluation data was needed or how to document when portions of a comprehensive evaluation were brought forward from a previous evaluation. For example, students with two or more consistent psychological exams may not have needed to be assessed again in ability, but the reevaluation documentation did not contain reference to the use of the previous assessment data, nor were the parents provided with notice of this practice. Without this documentation, it appeared as if students were not assessed in all areas of suspected disability. Parents were also not provided with all information concerning the assessments that the district proposes to utilize for their child.

The review team also did not find assessments in the area of secondary transition for students of transition age. File reviews and staff interview found that these assessments were not included as part of the reevaluation process for students at the high school level.

Principle 4 – Procedural Safeguards

Parents of children with disabilities have certain rights available. The school makes parents aware of these rights and makes sure they are understood. The specific areas addressed in principle four are adult student/transfer of rights, content of rights, consent, written notice, confidentiality and access to records, independent educational evaluation (IEE), complaint procedures, and due process hearings.

Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary

Data sources used:

- ? Comprehensive plan
- ? Parent rights form
- ? Student file reviews
- ? Student surveys
- ? Prior notice forms

Maintenance

The district ensures that the decision for special education transfer of rights is addressed by the 17th birthday. The district plan ensures that an appropriate complaint procedure is in place. The district has policies and procedures which follows IDEA and FERPA requirements regarding confidentiality and student file information. The district maintains confidentiality and records of activity regarding student information. The district's policy informs parents in their native language for the activity for which consent is sought. Information is provided to parents in their own language. Due process hearing policies are in place. Policies regarding independent educational evaluation are in place

Areas that need improvement

Some parents and adult students were informed of the transfer of rights by the student's 17th birthday. Policy ensures that parent's rights are provided and consent gained for each required activity.

Validation Results

Maintenance

The review team agrees with all areas identified as maintenance for procedural safeguards with the exception of transfer of rights and the location of student file information.

Areas that need improvement

The review team agrees with all areas identified as needing improvement for procedural safeguards with the addition of prior notice/consent for evaluations and student file information. Through file reviews it was found that parental notice/consent is not always obtained for transition evaluations. These evaluations were not necessarily included in the reevaluation process, but rather occurred on an intermittent basis with no notice or consent.

The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act requires that all student files include information that alerts parents and other school personnel that other records on the student may be found in other locations. A form of this type was found in all student files reviewed, but in most cases there were not other locations noted on the form. Rather these forms were left blank and not utilized for their intended purpose.

Principle 5 – Individualized Education Program

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) is a written document for a child with a disability that is developed, reviewed and revised by the IEP team, which includes the parent. The specific areas addressed in principle five are IEP team, IEP content, transition components for secondary IEPs, annual reviews, transition from early intervention program, and IEP related issues.

Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary

Data sources used:

- ? Student file reviews
- ? Parental safeguards and procedural rights handbook
- ? Comprehensive plan
- ? Parent survey
- ? Child count data
- ? Regular and special educator surveys
- ? Student surveys

Maintenance

The district has policies and procedures in place for the development of an appropriate student IEP. The district is documenting all IEP content that is required. The district implements policies and procedures regarding appropriate team membership. The district is meeting the needs of the staff to successfully implement all student goals and objectives. The district completes required paperwork for IEPs within the allotted time frames. The district has policies in place to aid in the transitioning of students. After each IEP meeting parents receive a copy of the IEP and are informed when services will begin. The district is effective in reporting progress of students in the special education program.

Areas that need improvement

There seems to be a discrepancy with information being presented and what parents perceive is being said regarding post-secondary options. Although all prior notices were sent out, not all required components were identified appropriately.

Areas out of compliance

Transition services for students age 14 and above are not documented as required. Students are not informed of the transfer of rights consistently at age 17.

Validation Results

Promising Practices

Although the steering committee did not identify any promising practices for the principle of individual education program, the review team found the use of the district's computerized IEP to be a promising practice. The district chose to utilize a forms program and develop a template that uses the state suggested IEP form, with additional improvements made by the district. This forms program allows the special education director to highlight areas of the IEP that may be commonly missed, as well as providing the special educators with a method to develop IEPs for the parents that are easy to read and professional in appearance. IEP content was then consistently addressed in the district through the use of this program. This program is also very affordable, so other districts could easily obtain and use this program in their schools.

Maintenance

The review team agrees with all areas of maintenance that were identified by the steering committee. The district consistently maintains compliance with regards to the development of IEPs, required IEP content, IEP team, the implementation of student goals and objectives, IEP timeframes, the reporting of student progress, and the provision of IEP copies to parents.

Areas that need improvement

The review team agrees that staff needs training to ensure that prior notice forms are accurately completed. Of 29 files reviewed by the team, 6 of the student files contained parental prior notices that were not completed with required content. The review team also found that students are not consistently informed of the transfer of rights by age 17. These are both areas of needed improvement for the Douglas School District.

Areas out of compliance

24:05:27:13.02. Transition services.

Transition services must be a coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to postschool activities. These services could include postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, and/or community participation. The coordinated set of activities must be based on the individual student's needs and take into account the student's preferences and interests.

The Douglas School District steering committee did identify transition as an area that is out of compliance and the review team agrees that secondary transition is an area of non-compliance for the district.

The monitoring team found the Douglas School District did not ensure that IEPs of students addressed transition as a coordinated set of activities with a goal-oriented approach. Through review of all IEPs and student files seen at the transition level, the review team found that courses and activities were not related to the overall goal, and the goals and transition plans were generic and did not address individual future outcomes, but focused primarily on passing courses and graduating. Through interview with district staff, the team became aware that staff is unclear how to integrate transition planning and the planning of coursework for students at the high school level.

Principle 6 – Least Restrictive Environment

After the IEP is developed or reviewed, the IEP team must decide where the IEP services are to be provided. Consideration begins in the general education classroom for school age students. The specific areas addressed in principle six are placement decisions, consent for initial placement, least restrictive environment procedures, preschool children, and LRE related issues.

Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary

Data sources used:

- ? Comprehensive plan
- ? Budget information
- ? Surveys
- ? Inservice training information
- ? Personnel information

- ? Enrollment data
- ? Student file reviews
- ? Complaints/hearings
- ? Placement data

Maintenance

The district has policies and procedures in place to support a continuum of LRE. Staff is appropriately documenting the removal of students from the general education environment. The district meets the least restrictive environment needs of its student's.

Areas that need improvement

The district is not meeting the staff training and scheduling needs in the area of modifications/accommodations and revisions that need to be made to the general curriculum for students with disabilities.

Validation Results

Promising practices

Although the steering committee did not identify a promising practice in the principle of least restrictive environment, the review team noted the infrastructure of the Douglas School District at the primary level to be a promising practice that truly benefits children. The school buildings from preschool to third grade are all connected together for continuity and communication purposes between educators. The district has a community day care and preschool within this structure that serves both children with and without disabilities. The district has all day, every day, Kindergarten to enhance literacy, as well as consistency with their day to day curriculum. Each of the school buildings has a school nurse on duty as well as many other support services. Collaboration is evident with the local Headstart program and the district has a well developed after school program. Finally, all class sizes at the primary level are kept at 18 children or below for smaller teacher/children ratio and more individual student attention. All of these factors added together comprise high-quality programming and instructional practices for children at the primary level in Douglas School District.

Maintenance

The review team agrees with all areas of maintenance that were identified by the steering committee. The district consistently maintains compliance in meeting the needs of students with a continuum of least restrictive environment services, and appropriately documenting the removal of students from the general education environment.

Areas that need improvement

The review team agrees that the district is not meeting the staff training a scheduling needs in the area of modification/accommodations and revisions that need to be made to the general curriculum for students with disabilities. During interview, staff indicated that they would like more training and time in their schedules to make required modifications and accommodations for students.